21 September 2005

Original: English

Committee on Conferences
Substantive session of 2005

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Enno **Drofenik** (Austria)

II. Calendar of conferences and meetings

C. Improved utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

Meeting statistics of United Nations organs and consultations with bodies concerning utilization of the conference services available to them

Introduction and overview

1. At its 465th meeting, on 19 September 2005, the Committee reviewed the statistical data and analysis contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences concerning the planned and actual utilization of conference resources allocated to a core sample of bodies that met in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi in 2004 (A/60/93, paras. 3-15 and annex I). The representative of the Secretariat noted that over the past few years the overall utilization factor had steadily improved. There had also been an improvement in the number of sessions with utilization over the benchmark and an improvement in meeting ratios and planning accuracy. For 2004, the overall utilization factor for the four duty stations was 83 per cent, which was six percentage points higher than the factor for 2003. For New York, the rate had risen to 79 per cent from 70 per cent in 2003. The number of bodies underutilizing their resources had been reduced by five. The improvements were due to the closer involvement of meeting planners in the programming of sessions, as well as to the conscientious efforts by secretariats and bureaux to utilize allocated resources more efficiently. Meeting planners continued to examine the reasons for any utilization below the established benchmark of 80 per cent.

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2. The Committee also heard an oral report by the Chairman of the Committee on his consultations with bodies that had consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure of their allocated resources for the previous three sessions. The Chairman noted that the proactive policy of meeting planners had yielded positive results and had notably improved the accuracy of planning fully serviced meetings. He welcomed in particular the willingness of the secretariats and bureaux of the bodies concerned to engage in serious discussion of their situation. Nine bodies had consistently utilized less than the benchmark figure of 80 per cent of allocated resources, leading to a significant loss of financial resources and to unutilized conference resources that might otherwise have been available for reassignment. The number of cancelled meetings with interpretation had declined as a result of measures implemented to streamline and better coordinate planning. However, late starts and early endings of meetings continued to reflect negatively on statistics. The sharing of best practices was presented as an effective way to improve the situation and to determine the specific utilization patterns of individual bodies. It was difficult to identify a uniform solution, however, since each body had its own individual programme of work and method of conducting business. The Chairman recommended that consultations with the bodies concerned be conducted on a more regular basis, and that they be informed of their meetings statistics on a weekly basis.

Discussion

3. With respect to the methodology used to calculate the utilization factor, delegations wished to know whether informal meetings and cancellations were included in the statistics. It was explained that informal meetings were factored in, and that cancellations were not counted as wasted time if they were made before the programme of meetings was finalized. Even if a late cancellation occurred, it was not counted as wasted time as long as it was offset by the reassignment of the interpreting team to a related body. The Electronic Meetings Planning and Resource Allocation System (eMeets) made it possible to have up-to-the-minute statistics. As a result, consultations between meeting planners and users of conference facilities could be carried out more effectively on the basis of utilization statistics. It was agreed that efforts should be made to encourage users to make more efficient use of conference facilities, whether by requesting shorter blocks of time for their meetings or by convening informal meetings in smaller conference rooms to free up the main conference rooms and interpretation services for other users. The primary consideration for all users should be to ensure the best use of the Organization's resources on a system-wide basis.

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C. Improved utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

Provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States

Introduction and overview

1. At its 465th meeting, on 19 September 2005, the Committee considered the statistical data and analysis contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences concerning the provision of conference services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States during the period from 1 May 2004 to 30 April 2005 (A/60/93, paras. 17-30 and annex II). There had been a dramatic 29 per cent increase in the number of meetings requested by regional and other major groupings and held without interpretation. The percentage of meetings that were provided with interpretation during the reporting period 2004-2005 had decreased, in relative terms, to 85 per cent from 90 per cent during the previous period. Moreover, in absolute terms, the total number of meetings provided with interpretation also decreased. While the introduction of eMeets as a tool for requesting conference facilities has brought about an improvement in the quality of services, the continuously high workload stemming from the sessions of calendar bodies left little capacity for accommodating additional meetings.

Discussion

2. Concern was expressed about the apparent lack of contingency arrangements for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States during times

of peak activity. It was also suggested that the improvement in the overall utilization factor was something of a mixed blessing, as it effectively left fewer resources for reassignment to regional and other major groupings. Some delegations expressed disappointment at the proposals made for improving the situation. Some expressed the view that existing practices should be changed and that it might be wise to dedicate specific resources for such meetings, as had been suggested but not approved in previous years. The view was also expressed that the work of the sessions of the calendar bodies were the Department's main priority and that the regional groupings were accommodated on an ad hoc basis, in accordance with established practice. The representative of the Secretariat referred delegates to paragraph 30 of the report, in which it was stated that unless dedicated funds were provided for regional group meetings, the Secretariat must depend on the flexibility of Member States in moving meeting dates to further improve the chances of obtaining interpretation. The report also suggested that the needs of regional and other major groupings might be incorporated into the organization of work of calendar bodies as "related reassignments".

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II. Calendar of conferences and meetings

C. Improved utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

Improved utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi

1. At its 465th meeting, on 19 September 2005, the Committee considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences concerning the utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/60/93, paras. 31-33). The Committee learned that, as a result of vigorous marketing efforts, the Office had been very successful in attracting more meetings to its facilities. The utilization rate had increased by 28 per cent during the biennium 2003-2004, compared with the previous biennium. In addition, through further streamlining, efficiency gains and increased client orientation, it had been possible to reduce the charges for conferencing services. Moreover, the Division of Conference Services had developed and widely distributed a service manual, brochures and a welcome booklet as well as a website to enhance its visibility. The Division had also intensified its efforts to become a major conference services provider in the region.

Discussion

2. Delegations expressed satisfaction that, after repeated requests from the General Assembly, there had now been an improvement in the utilization rate in Nairobi. They also expressed the hope that the upgrading of the facilities would be sustained. The view was expressed that no authorization should be given to hold

meetings of Nairobi-based bodies in other locations. It was explained that the Secretariat was carefully monitoring the situation.

Improved utilization of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa

3. At the same meeting, the Committee considered the section of the report providing an overview of efforts to improve the utilization of the facilities at the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa and the obstacles to be overcome (ibid., paras. 34-37). The Commission had introduced an integrated system for the management of its conferences and had conducted a fact-finding mission to identify best practices at similar conference centres within the United Nations system. There had been a notable increase in the level of activities at the centre over the past two years, with 500 events hosted in 2004 compared with 446 in 2003. However, security considerations had led to tighter control of access to, and restrictions on the use of, United Nations premises for commercial activities and this had had limited the potential to expand the use of the centre.

Discussion

4. Concern was expressed about the impact of the restrictions imposed on the Economic Commission for Africa conference centre and more information was requested about the security situation there and at other conference centres. It was hoped that legitimate users were not being prevented from using its facilities.